

Spiritual and Value-Based Islamic Educational Leadership in Indonesia: A Hermeneutic Inquiry into Love, Moderation, and Institutional Management

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ABSTRACT: This study proposes a conceptual framework that articulates the philosophical resonance between the spiritual-ethical teachings of Tanbih by Sheik Abdullah Mubarak a foundational text of the Qadiriyyah–Naqshabandiyyah Suryalaya tradition and Indonesia’s Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta, KBC), a recent policy initiative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in shaping spiritual and value-based Islamic educational leadership. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer), the research conducts a comparative interpretive analysis of these two texts to examine how the values of divine love (*mahabbah*) and moderation (*wasatīyyah/tawāzūn*) inform leadership orientation, ethical authority, and institutional direction within Islamic educational settings. The analysis identifies four interrelated dimensions of educational leadership: (1) an ontological foundation of leadership grounded in relational unity through divine love; (2) an ethical framework that reconciles spiritual integrity and civic responsibility through balance and moderation; (3) a compassionate pedagogical leadership approach that deepens the KBC’s “connection before correction” principle through the Sufi discipline of adab; and (4) a service-oriented leadership orientation rooted in rendah babarengan (humility in togetherness), re-envisioned as institutional khidmah. This study contributes to the field of Islamic Educational Leadership and Management by reframing leadership not merely as administrative control, but as a spiritually grounded, value-based practice that integrates ethical governance, compassionate pedagogy, and institutional responsibility. While the framework is conceptual and untested empirically, it offers a hermeneutically grounded theoretical foundation for future action research and case studies in madrasahs and other Islamic educational institutions. The study further invites scholarly inquiry into how locally rooted spiritual epistemologies can inform contemporary educational leadership and policy without being reduced to instrumental or bureaucratic functions.

Keywords: *Islamic Educational Leadership; Value-Based Leadership; Spiritual Leadership; Love-Based Education; Religious Moderation; Institutional Management; Hermeneutic Inquiry.*

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic educational leadership in Indonesia is increasingly confronted with the challenge of navigating contemporary policy reforms while sustaining the spiritual and ethical foundations that historically shaped authority, direction, and moral responsibility in Islamic education (Hamdanah et al., 2025; Ilyasin et al., 2025; Yuliana et al., 2025). Recent governance-oriented initiatives have

strengthened managerial accountability and institutional performance, yet they often leave unresolved questions regarding the spiritual ontology and value commitments that undergird educational leadership within madrasah and other Islamic institutions (Rochmat et al., 2025; Zamroni et al., 2025; Chotimah et al., 2025). This condition signals a critical need to reconceptualize leadership not merely as an administrative function, but as a value-laden practice through which institutional vision, ethical decision-making, and relational authority are meaningfully exercised (Atif & Fitzpatrick, 2025; Marzuki, 2023; Sosnowska, 2020). Within this context, spiritual and value-based leadership emerges as a pivotal framework for bridging the normative heritage of Islamic educational traditions with contemporary policy discourse (Dani Somantri & Dahwadin, 2020; Khotimah et al., 2024; Khalil, 2020). By foregrounding leadership as the primary locus of inquiry, this study situates institutional management as a consequential outcome of leadership orientation, thereby opening space for a hermeneutic engagement with indigenous spiritual values—particularly love (*mahabbah*) and moderation (*wasatiyyah/tawāzun*)—as foundational resources for Islamic educational leadership in Indonesia (Adewumi & Mitton, 2022; Aldridge, 2015; Qushwa, 2024).

Over the past decade, scholarly discourse has increasingly emphasized relational, affective, and spiritually resonant approaches to education. Globally, calls for “heart-centered” or “love-based” pedagogies have gained traction (Holles et al., 2025; Rodriguez, 2024), paralleled by policy innovations that prioritize social-emotional learning and ethical relationality (Larsen et al., 2025; Rozi et al., 2025; Restad & Mølsted, 2021). In Indonesia, this shift is institutionalized through the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ 2025 launch of the *Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (Love-Based Curriculum, KBC) (Kemenag, 2025), which explicitly integrates compassion (Sari, 2025), tolerance (Afriansyah & Sirozi, 2025), and ecological consciousness (Kaur et al., 2023) into Islamic education (Aslinda & Amrizon, 2025; Danil et al., 2025; Mujahidin et al., 2025). Concurrently, research on Sufi traditions has illuminated the ethical depth of texts like *Tanbih* (Mubarak, 2009), highlighting concepts such as servant leadership (Demeke et al., 2024; Greenleaf, 2014; Hidayat, 2023), humility (*rendah babarengan*) (Dani Somantri & Dahwadin, 2020), and cosmic balance (*tawāzun*) (Zulqarnain & Ali, 2023; Suryana et al., 2024; Thakadipuram, 2024). Meanwhile, studies on Islamic school governance have examined policy implementation, stakeholder dynamics, and institutional reform (Bandur et al., 2022; Sutrisno, 2025; Purwanto & Haryanti, 2025).

A critical review of this literature, however, reveals two distinct, largely non-communicating streams of research. The first, which is policy-oriented, examines the KBC and school governance through a technocratic lens. Studies like Sari (2025) and Bandur et al. (2022) focus on curriculum design, policy dissemination, and stakeholder responses, treating “love” and “moderation” as pedagogical variables to be managed and assessed. The second stream, which is spiritually-grounded, analyzes Sufi concepts within a historical or ethical framework. Works by Mubarak (2009) on *Tanbih* and Hidayat (2023) on servant leadership, for instance, explore the rich spiritual ontology of these values but rarely connect them to the contemporary challenges of institutional management. These scholarly conversations run in parallel, seldom intersecting to inform one another. Despite these advances, a critical disconnect persists between policy-oriented and spiritually grounded scholarship.

The disconnect illustrated above—where policy-oriented scholarship tends to treat values like “love” or “moderation” as operational categories, while Sufi studies often remain within historical or devotional frameworks—points to a significant gap in current discourse. On one hand, analyses of educational policy frequently overlook the ontological and spiritual depth from which such values originate (Adewumi & Mitton, 2022; Nurhayati & Lumiati, 2025; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021). On the other, interpretations of Sufi texts such as *Tanbih* rarely engage with the practical demands of contemporary institutional management (Shahi, 2019; Umam, 2024; Mukarromah et al., 2025). This scholarly separation may limit the potential resonance of policy initiatives like the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) with local epistemic traditions, especially if its affective language is implemented without grounding in indigenous spiritual frameworks (Diab et al., 2022; Dupuy & Defacqz, 2022). Conversely, rich ethical resources like *Tanbih* risk remaining underutilized in educational reform if

they are not brought into dialogue with current policy challenges. The present study therefore seeks to address this gap not by evaluating policy success or failure, but by offering a conceptual hermeneutic bridge—one that articulates how spiritual ontology and institutional practice might inform one another in the Indonesian Islamic education context.

To address this scholarly gap, the study poses a central guiding question: How might Islamic educational leadership in Indonesia be re-envisioned by situating *mahabbah* (divine love) as an ontological orientation and *wasatīyah/tawāzūn* (moderation/balance) as normative principles guiding leadership practice and institutional direction? This inquiry unfolds through four interrelated sub-questions: (1) How can the Sufi concept of *mahabbah* be interpreted as an ontological grounding for contemporary Islamic educational leadership (2) In what ways might the ethical principles of *wasatīyah* and *tawāzūn* inform a coherent framework for Islamic educational leadership that bridges spiritual conviction and civic responsibility? (3) How can the compassionate pedagogical ethos articulated in *Tanbih* enrich the leadership interpretation and institutional application of the KBC's principle of “connection before correction”? (4) How might the leadership ideal of *rendah babarengan* (humility in togetherness) inform a contextually grounded model of service-oriented Islamic educational leadership within madrasah institutions?

This study is situated within the Indonesian Islamic education landscape, where madrasahs and pesantrens continually negotiate the tensions between spiritual tradition and state-led reform. The analysis focuses on two key texts: (1) *Tanbih*, a Sufi ethical treatise from the Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyah Suryalaya tradition, and (2) the official 2025 *Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (KBC) policy document issued by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. The primary objective of this research is to construct a hermeneutically grounded conceptual framework that articulates how divine love (*mahabbah*) and moderation (*wasatīyah/tawāzūn*)-as articulated in these distinct yet resonant discourses-can inform a spiritually rooted model of Islamic educational management.

This article makes two specific contributions to the field of Islamic educational leadership. First, it bridges a critical scholarly gap by dialogically connecting Sufi ontological ethics with contemporary educational policy, thereby repositioning leadership-rather than management alone-as the primary site where spiritual values are interpreted, enacted, and institutionalized. Second, it offers a decolonially conscious recentering of Islamic educational leadership as an ethical and relational practice grounded in divine love (*mahabbah*), compassionate pedagogy, and service-oriented authority, through which institutional governance is meaningfully shaped. While the analysis focuses on madrasah contexts, the proposed framework also opens conceptual pathways for reimagining value-based leadership across broader Islamic educational institutions. Notably, it invites reflection on how spiritually grounded leadership might inform governance in *Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam* (PTKI), where tensions between bureaucratic accountability and moral vision are increasingly salient, and where leadership models rooted in indigenous epistemic traditions could enrich institutional identity beyond technocratic compliance.

METHOD

This study adopts a philosophical hermeneutic approach to interpret educational texts and ethical values as foundational orientations for Islamic educational leadership, particularly in shaping leadership ethics, moral authority, and institutional direction. This approach was chosen because the central research problem bridging the hermeneutic chasm between a sacred Sufi text and a secular policy document-is fundamentally interpretive, not empirical, particularly in relation to how spiritual values are rearticulated as orientations for Islamic educational leadership. The study's aim is not to measure outcomes but to synthesize new meaning from two distinct epistemic worlds in order to inform leadership ethics, moral authority, and institutional direction within Islamic education. Therefore, philosophical hermeneutics is uniquely suited for this task, as its core principle of a “fusion of horizons” provides a rigorous framework for creating a generative dialogue between texts. The methodological choice is deliberate: rather than conducting empirical fieldwork

or a conventional literature review, this study treats foundational texts as living sources of meaning that can be brought into generative dialogue through interpretive engagement with leadership-oriented concerns at the institutional level. Philosophical hermeneutics, as articulated by Gadamer (2013), provides the epistemological foundation, emphasizing that understanding arises not from recovering authorial intent but through a fusion of horizons a dynamic encounter between the historical-spiritual world of the text and the contemporary socio-political context of the interpreter. Accordingly, institutional management is examined in this study as a derivative outcome of leadership orientation rather than as an autonomous analytical focus.

The research targets are not human participants but two purposively selected primary texts that represent distinct yet complementary epistemic horizons. The first is *Tanbih* (2009) by Shaykh Abdullah Mubarak, a Sufi ethical treatise from the Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyyah Suryalaya tradition that articulates a holistic ontology of love, balance, and servant leadership rooted in lived *adab*. The second is the official policy document *Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (Love-Based Curriculum, KBC, 2025) issued by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, which institutionalizes affective, relational, and spiritually resonant values in formal Islamic education. These texts were chosen because their juxtaposition—sacred-communal versus secular-bureaucratic—creates a productive hermeneutic tension (Aldridge, 2015) that enables conceptual innovation rather than mere harmonization.

Data collection consisted of iterative, in-depth readings of the full texts of *Tanbih* (Mubarak, 2009) and the official *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (Kemenag, 2025) between January and June 2025. Both digital and printed versions were used to facilitate comprehensive engagement. As this study is conceptual rather than empirical, the researcher served as the primary interpretive instrument—an approach consistent with philosophical hermeneutics, which treats the interpreter's situatedness not as a bias to eliminate, but as a necessary horizon of understanding (Gadamer et al., 2013). To mitigate arbitrariness, the analysis focused on core structural sections of the KBC document (e.g., philosophical foundations, pedagogical principles, leadership vision, and the *Panca Cinta* framework) rather than isolated excerpts, and cross-referenced all selected passages with the document's stated objectives and organizational logic. The researcher's dual grounding—in both Sufi intellectual traditions and contemporary Islamic education policy—was acknowledged reflexively and leveraged to enable a dialogical reading between spiritual and bureaucratic discourses, not to impose external interpretations.

Data analysis followed an iterative, interpretive process informed by—but not strictly replicating—Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, adapted here to serve philosophical hermeneutics rather than empirical social research. The process unfolded in three reflexive stages: (1) Initial Immersion: Repeated close readings of both *Tanbih* and the full KBC policy document to grasp internal logic, rhetorical structures, and normative claims. All sections of both texts were read—not only passages aligned with expected themes to minimize selective interpretation. (2) Thematic Mapping: Concepts were identified and coded across four pre-established analytical domains—ontology, ethics, pedagogy, and educational management—using a combination of inductive observations and theory-driven categories (e.g., *mahabbah*, *wasatīyah*, *rendah babarengan*, “connection before correction”). Coding was documented in a shared digital log, with direct textual excerpts and page references preserved for traceability. (3) Comparative Articulation: Rather than a “dialectical synthesis” implying resolution of contradiction, this stage involved systematic comparison of how each domain is expressed in both texts. To enhance transparency, a thematic comparison matrix (see Table 1) was constructed, juxtaposing core propositions from *Tanbih* and KBC side by side. This matrix served as the basis for interpretive commentary, not as proof of “fusion,” but as a scaffold for philosophical reflection. While the study references recent literature (including 2025 publications), we acknowledge that many of these works are early-stage academic responses to the newly launched KBC, not yet subject to longitudinal validation. Our engagement with them is therefore provisional and contextual, used to situate our conceptual work within ongoing discourse—not as triangulation in the empirical sense.

To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, the study adheres to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative validity. Credibility was maintained through prolonged engagement with the texts, peer debriefing with scholars in Islamic studies and education policy, and triangulation with interdisciplinary literature from philosophy of education, Sufi ethics, and policy implementation theory. Dependability was secured by maintaining a transparent audit trail that documents all interpretive decisions, coding iterations, and synthetic moves. Confirmability was upheld by grounding every analytical claim in direct textual evidence with precise citations and by reflexively acknowledging the researcher's positionality.

Although no human subjects were involved, ethical integrity was ensured through scholarly accountability, contextual sensitivity, and fidelity to the internal logics of the texts. This hermeneutic approach exemplifies what MacLeod et al. (2023) term hermeneutics in implementation, offering a methodologically sound and contextually grounded pathway to transform spiritual wisdom into actionable educational praxis within the Indonesian Islamic education landscape.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Ontological Foundations of Islamic Educational Leadership

In the results section, the foundational ontological claim that emerges as a basis for Islamic educational leadership centers on the fundamental unity of humanity, rooted in divine love. This ontological orientation is not presented merely as a metaphysical assertion, but as a normative foundation shaping how leadership authority, relational responsibility, and institutional direction are ethically exercised within Islamic educational contexts. The text of *Tanbih* articulates this through the principle of a single human origin and divine honor bestowed upon humanity, thereby grounding leadership responsibility in an ethic of relational unity rather than hierarchical domination. It states in full:

“Tab kitu pigeusanun manusa anu pinuh karumasaan, sanajan jeung sejen bangsa, sabab tunggal turunan ti Nabi Adam AS, numutkeun ayat 70 surat Isra’ anu pisundaennana kieu: kacida ngamulyakeunnana Kami ka turunan Adam, jeung Kami nyebarkeun sakabeh daratan oge lautan, jeung ngarijikian Kami ka maranehannana, anu aya di darat jeung lautan, jeung Kami ngautamakeun ka maranehannana malah leuwih utama ti makhluk anu sejenna. Jadi harti ieu ayat nyaeta akur jeung batur batur ulah aya kuciwana.” (Mubarok, 2009, pp. 3–4).

Translation: Thus is the attitude of a truly conscious human being, even toward those of different nations, because they are of a single descent from Prophet Adam AS, according to verse 70 of Surah Al-Isra', of which the Sundanese interpretation is as follows: The descendants of Adam have been greatly honored, carried across the land and the sea, provided with good things for sustenance, and favored with a marked preference over many other created beings. Thus, the meaning of this verse is that one should be in harmony with others and harbor no ill will.

This ontological affirmation establishes *mahabbah* (divine love) as the ethical ground from which leadership dispositions—such as humility, inclusivity, and moral responsibility—are expected to emerge within Islamic educational institutions.

In the KBC document presents a similar ontology of unity, defining it as *mushmat* (an inseparable whole) where a universal law of love, or *sympathea*, operates. Within the framework of Islamic educational leadership, this ontology situates leadership not as an isolated function of

authority, but as a relational practice embedded within the interconnectedness of God, humanity, and the natural world. The document explicitly defines this core concept:

“Secara ontologis, manusia dan alam adalah satu kesatuan. Saling mencerminkan, sekaligus manunggal (mushmat). Di antara keduanya bekerja mekanisme sympathea (saling cinta, ‘isyq/ḥubb).” (Kemenag, 2025, p. 10)

Translation: “Ontologically, humans and nature are a unified whole. They reflect one another and are simultaneously united (mushmat). Between them operates the mechanism of sympathea (mutual love, ‘isyq/ḥubb).”

This relational ontology is further elaborated in the KBC as an inseparable unity between God, humanity, and the universe, forming the metaphysical basis for harmony and balance. When interpreted through a leadership lens, this unity implies that educational leaders are ethically accountable not only for institutional outcomes, but also for sustaining relational harmony and moral coherence within educational communities.

“Tuban, manusia, dan alam semesta (secara ontologis) merupakan satu kesatuan yang utuh dan tak terpisahkan. Ketiganya saling mencerminkan dan manunggal (mushmat) dalam esensinya. Dalam kesatuan ini, beroperasi sebuah mekanisme fundamental yang disebut sympathea—saling cinta (‘isyq/ḥubb)—sebagai pondasi bagi terciptanya keserasian dan keseimbangan kehidupan.” (Kemenag, 2025, p. 11).

Translation: “God, humanity, and the universe (ontologically) constitute an integral and inseparable unity. The three reflect one another and are united (mushmat) in their essence. Within this unity operates a fundamental mechanism known as sympathea—mutual love (‘isyq/ḥubb)—which serves as the foundation for the creation of harmony and balance in life.”

Taken together, these ontological claims position *mahabbah* not only as a metaphysical principle, but as a foundational orientation for Islamic educational leadership—one that shapes ethical authority, relational governance, and the moral direction of institutional practice.

Ethical Principles Guiding Islamic Educational Leadership

Within the framework of Islamic educational leadership, ethical moderation (*wasatīyyah/tawāzun*) emerges as a guiding principle that shapes how leaders navigate the relationship between religious commitment and civic responsibility. In *Tanbih*, this ethical orientation is articulated as a balanced disposition that neither absolutizes religious authority nor dissolves it into uncritical conformity with state power. Instead, leadership is positioned as a moral responsibility that requires discernment, balance, and ethical restraint. The text commands:

“Ulah aya carekeun Agama jeung Nagara” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 1).

Translation: Do not violate the commands of Religion and State.

This principle is further extended to inter-communal relations, where leaders are advised to cultivate social harmony without compromising doctrinal integrity. Drawing on Surah al-Kafirun, *Tanbih* emphasizes that ethical leadership entails maintaining peaceful coexistence while preserving clear moral boundaries. It states:

“Ari sebagai agama, saagamana saagamana, nurutkeun surat al-Kafirun ayat 6: Agama anjeun keur anjeun, agama kuring keur kuring. Surahna ulah jadi papaseaan, “kudu akeur jeung batur-batur tapi ulah campur baur,” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 4).

Translation: “Religion is religion, whatever it may be. According to Surah Al-Kafirun verse 6: ‘Your religion is for you, and my religion is for me.’ This verse should not be a source of conflict. We must live in harmony with others, but without mixing or compromising our beliefs.”

The Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) grounds its ethical framework in moderation as a corrective to contemporary educational fragmentation. When interpreted through a leadership lens, the KBC frames ethical transformation not merely as pedagogical reform, but as a reorientation of leadership values that guide institutional culture and decision-making. The KBC document itself describes this corrective measure as a fundamental paradigm shift centered on love, detailing four crucial transformations:

“Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC) merepresentasikan sebuah pergeseran paradigma mendasar dalam pendekatan pendidikan. KBC menawarkan lensa baru untuk melihat dunia melalui prinsip cinta sebagai perekat utama. Transformasi ini dapat ditelaah melalui empat dimensi kerusial, yaitu transformasi dari teologi yang maskulin menuju teologi cinta, dari orientasi hukum formal menuju orientasi kasih, dari pandangan antroposentris menuju ekoteologi, dan dari pemikiran atomistik menuju holistik,” (Kemenag, 2025, pp. 16–17)

Translation: The Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) represents a fundamental paradigm shift in educational approaches. KBC offers a new lens through which to view the world, with love as its central binding principle. This transformation can be examined through four crucial dimensions: a shift from masculine theology to a theology of love, from formal legal orientation to a compassion-based orientation, from an anthropocentric worldview to ecotheology, and from atomistic thinking to holistic understanding.

These ethical shifts are explicitly intended to cultivate leadership dispositions such as tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), moderation (*tawassuṭ*), and consultation (*shūrā*), which the KBC identifies as essential for building harmonious and peaceful relationships within educational institutions and the broader society (Kemenag, 2025, p. 30). Taken together, these ethical principles position *wasatīyyah* and *tawāḍun* not merely as social virtues, but as core ethical foundations of Islamic educational leadership, guiding leaders in balancing religious integrity, civic responsibility, and institutional harmony.

Compassionate Pedagogy as Leadership Practice in Islamic Education

Within Islamic educational leadership, compassionate pedagogy functions not merely as an instructional technique, but as a concrete expression of leadership ethics enacted in everyday institutional practice. *Tanbih* outlines this by instructing educators to lead with “gentle and full of love” (*renwas jeung giras*) (Mubarok, 2009, p. 3) and provides a detailed tripartite ethical framework for interpersonal conduct. This pedagogical ethic is further elaborated through a tripartite framework that structures leadership relations across institutional hierarchies

Toward superiors (*ka salubureun*), *Tanbih* commands respect and relational harmony, emphasizing that ethical leadership requires humility and recognition of shared dignity rather than competitive assertion of status. It commands respect and harmony: It states

“Ka salubureun ulah naduk boh salubureun barkatna atawa darajatna, boh dina kabogana estu kudu luyu akur jeung batur batur.” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 2)

Translation: Do not be arrogant toward those of higher status, whether in dignity or rank; rather, always maintain harmony with others.

Toward peers (*ka papantaran*), leadership is expressed through *rendah babarengan* (humility in togetherness), where authority is exercised collaboratively in fulfilling religious and civic responsibilities. This orientation reflects a relational model of leadership that privileges solidarity over domination. It states:

“Ka papantaran urang dina sagala-galanya, ulah rek pasea, sabalikna kudu rendah babarengan dina enggoning ngalakukeun parentah Agama jeung Nagara.” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 2)

Translation: In all matters with equals, do not seek superiority; instead, practice humility in togetherness while fulfilling the commands of Religion and State.

Toward juniors or students (*ka sabandapeun*), *Tanbih* issues an unequivocal directive against humiliation, positioning leadership authority as protective and nurturing rather than punitive. It states:

“*Ka sabandapeun ulah bayang ngahina.*” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 3)

Translation: Do not intend to humiliate those beneath you.

The pinnacle of this compassionate ethic is the injunction to love one’s enemies:

“*Kudu asih ka jalma nu mikangewa ka maneh.*” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 6)

Translation: You must love those who hate you.

The culmination of this compassionate leadership ethic is the injunction to extend love even toward one’s adversaries, underscoring a leadership orientation grounded in moral courage and emotional self-regulation rather than reactive hostility. The Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) operationalizes this compassionate leadership ethos by explicitly redefining discipline not as punitive enforcement but as relational understanding (*memahami, bukan menghakimi*), and by institutionalizing “connection before correction” as a foundational leadership principle guiding pedagogical decision-making (Kemenag, 2025, pp. 37–38).

To support this orientation, the KBC formally adopts Positive Discipline and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as core instructional approaches, signaling a shift from fear-based classroom control toward leadership practices that cultivate trust, mutual respect, and intrinsic motivation (Kemenag, 2025, p. 38).

Furthermore, the curriculum structures its entire affective dimension around five interrelated thematic pillars—collectively termed *Panca Cinta* (Five Loves)—which serve as both ethical anchors and curricular content: (1) love for Allah and His Messenger, (2) love for knowledge, (3) love for the environment, (4) love for oneself and fellow human beings, and (5) love for the homeland (Kemenag, 2025, pp. 26–30). Taken together, these pedagogical practices demonstrate how compassionate pedagogy operates as a form of Islamic educational leadership—one that translates spiritual ethics into everyday authority, relational governance, and the cultivation of humane institutional cultures.

Servant Leadership and Institutional *Khidmah* in Islamic Education

At the level of Islamic educational leadership, both texts articulate a service-oriented leadership ethos grounded in humility, moral responsibility, and communal well-being. *In Tanbih*, this leadership orientation is expressed through the principle of *rendah babarengan* (humility in togetherness), which frames authority as collective responsibility rather than hierarchical domination. The text states:

“*Kudu rendah babarengan dina enggoning ngalakukeun parentah Agama jeung Nagara.*” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 2)

Translation: One must be humble in togetherness while carrying out the commands of Religion and State.

This ethic of humble leadership is further reinforced through explicit instructions to extend compassion toward the marginalized, positioning leadership as an act of *kebidmah* (service) to the vulnerable rather than a pursuit of institutional power. The text instructs leaders to embody empathy, generosity, and moral sincerity:

“*Anu pakir jeung nu miskin kudu welas asih someah tur budi bersih serta daek mere maweh, nganyatakeun hate urang sareh.*” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 3)

Translation: The poor and the needy must be met with empathy, kindness, sincerity, and generosity, demonstrating the purity of one’s heart (Mubarok, 2009, p. 3).

The ultimate communal goal of leadership is defined as *Cageur Bageur*—a holistic state of physical and moral flourishing. Rather than being framed as a managerial outcome, *Cageur Bageur* represents the ethical telos of Islamic educational leadership, where institutional life is oriented toward the well-being of both individuals and the community. The text describes this ideal as follows:

“*Kudu arapik tilik jeung pamilih, dina nyiar jalan kabadean lahir bathin dunya akberat sangkan ngeunah nyawa betah jasad, ulah jadi kabengkahan anu disuprih Cageur Bageur.*” (Mubarok, 2009, p. 5)

Translation: One must be vigilant and discerning in seeking the path of holistic well-being—physical and spiritual, worldly and hereafter—so that the soul is at ease and the body at peace, avoiding disgrace and fulfilling the ideal of *Cageur Bageur*.

The Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) articulates a parallel leadership vision by explicitly endorsing Servant Leadership, framed as *Kepemimpinan Berbasis Cinta*. Within this framework, leadership authority is defined by service rather than control, and is operationalized through the institutional vision of *Madrasah Ramah Anak* (Child-Friendly Madrasah). This vision emphasizes safety, inclusivity, and protection as core leadership responsibilities, positioning educational leaders as moral guardians of institutional culture rather than mere administrators. The document defines this vision as follows:

“*Tujuan utama KBC adalah menciptakan Madrasah Ramah Anak, yaitu lingkungan belajar yang mengutamakan keamanan dan toleransi di atas segalanya. Ini berarti madrasah harus sepenuhnya aman dari berbagai bentuk kekerasan, baik fisik maupun psikis, termasuk perundungan (bullying) dan kekerasan seksual. Lebih dari itu, madrasah ramah anak adalah ruang yang terbuka dan toleran di mana tidak ada tempat bagi diskriminasi dan intoleransi berdasarkan latar belakang, suku, agama, atau karakteristik individu lainnya. Setiap anak merasa diterima, dihargai, dan terlindungi sehingga memungkinkan mereka untuk belajar dan berkembang tanpa rasa takut.*” (Kemenag, 2025, p. 15).

Translation: The main goal of the KBC is to create a Child-Friendly Madrasah, which is a learning environment that prioritizes safety and tolerance above all else. This means the madrasah must be completely safe from all forms of violence, both physical and psychological, including bullying and sexual violence. Furthermore, a child-friendly madrasah is an open and tolerant space where there is no room for discrimination and intolerance based on background, ethnicity, religion, or other individual characteristics. Every child feels accepted, valued, and protected, enabling them to learn and grow without fear.

Table 1 Hermeneutic Mapping of Leadership-Oriented Values in *Tanbih* and the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC)

Analytical Domain	Tanbih (Mubarok, 2009)	KBC Policy Document (Kemenag, 2025)
Ontology Foundations of Leadership	Unity of humanity through shared Adamic origin; divine honor bestowed on all (“ <i>kacida ngamulyakeunnana Kami ka turunan Adam</i> ”); relational existence grounded in <i>akur jeung batur-batur</i> (pp. 3–4).	Ontological unity of God, humanity, and nature as <i>mushmat</i> ; cosmic harmony sustained by <i>sympatheia</i> (mutual love) (pp. 10–11).
Ethical Principles Guiding Leadership	Dual imperative: “ <i>Ulah aya carekeun Agama jeung Nagara</i> ” (do not violate Religion and State) and “ <i>akur jeung batur-batur tapi ulah campur baur</i> ” (harmony without creedal compromise) (pp. 1, 4).	Moderation (<i>tawassut</i>) as corrective to fragmentation; promotes <i>tasāmuḥ</i> , <i>shūrā</i> , and balance through four paradigm shifts: from judgment to love, legalism to compassion, anthropocentrism to eco-theology, atomism to holism (pp. 16–17, 30).
Compassionate Pedagogy as	Compassionate relationality: “ <i>reuwas jeung giras</i> ” (gentle and loving); “ <i>ulah hayang</i>	“ <i>Koneksi sebelum koreksi</i> ” (connection before correction); discipline as “ <i>memahami,</i>

Leadership Practice	ngahina” (do not humiliate); “kudu asih ka jalma nu mikangewa ka maneh” (love those who hate you) (pp. 2–3, 6).	bukan menghakimi” (understanding, not judgment); affective framework structured around Panca Cinta (Five Loves) (pp. 26–30, 37–38).
Servant Leadership and Institutional Khidmah	Leadership as rendah babarengan (humility in togetherness) and welas asih (compassion for the vulnerable); ideal of Cageur Bageur—holistic physical-spiritual well-being (pp. 2–3, 5).	“Kepemimpinan Berbasis Cinta” (Love-Based Leadership); institutional vision of Madrasah Ramah Anak (Child-Friendly Madrasah)—safe, inclusive, protective environment (pp. 15, 37).

To synthesize the hermeneutic findings across the four analytical domains—ontology, ethics, pedagogy, and leadership—this study proposes an integrative conceptual framework. The model does not function as a prescriptive managerial blueprint, but as a hermeneutically grounded representation of how spiritual ontology and value-based leadership principles may inform Islamic educational governance in Indonesia. Figure 1 visualizes this synthesis by mapping the dialogical relationship between *Tanbih* and the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC), and by articulating the core orientations that emerge from their interpretive encounter.

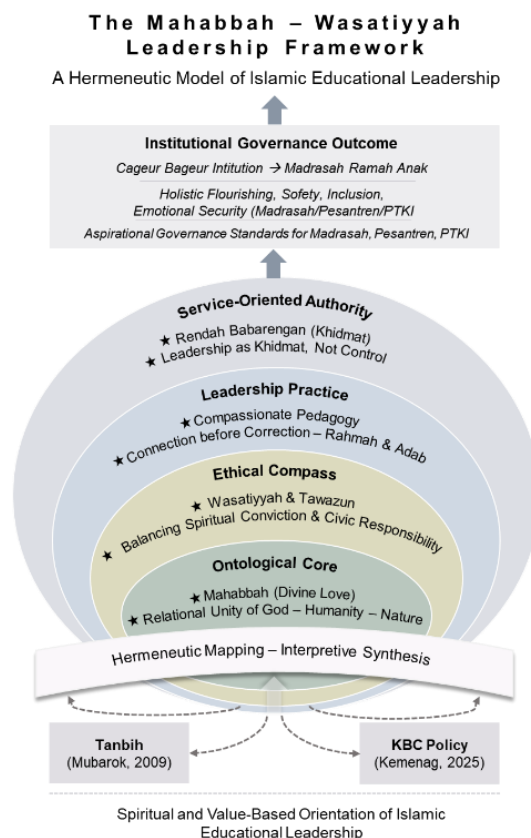


Figure 1. The Mahabbah–Wasatiyyah Leadership Framework: A Hermeneutic Model of Spiritual and Value-Based Islamic Educational Leadership in Indonesia

As depicted in Figure 1, the proposed framework positions mahabbah (divine love) as the ontological core of educational leadership, from which ethical moderation (wasatiyyah and tawazun) operates as a normative compass balancing spiritual conviction and civic responsibility. These orientations are enacted pedagogically through compassion-centered practices, such as “connection before correction,” and institutionally through service-oriented leadership grounded in rendah babarengan (humility in togetherness). Rather than asserting empirical generalization, the framework offers a conceptual lens for reimagining Islamic educational leadership as an ethical and relational practice embedded in Indonesia’s spiritual and policy landscapes.

Discussion

This section offers an interpretive analysis of the textual findings, moving beyond descriptive comparison toward a reflective hermeneutic engagement. Its purpose is not to construct a prescriptive or “transformative” model, but to explore how the ethical and ontological orientations of *Tanbih*—a Sufi ethical treatise from the Qādiriyyah Naqshbandiyyah Suryalaya tradition—and the policy discourse of Indonesia’s *Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (KBC) might be read in conceptual resonance. While the term “hermeneutic chasm” was initially used to signal a perceived discursive gap between spiritual and bureaucratic registers, this analysis acknowledges that such a gap may be more rhetorical than historical, given the shared cultural milieu of many KBC designers and Indonesia’s pesantren tradition. Rather than asserting a Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” as a resolved synthesis, this discussion treats the encounter between these texts as an open-ended interpretive exercise—one that illuminates possible philosophical alignments across four interrelated dimensions of Islamic educational leadership: relational ontology as a leadership worldview, ethical moderation as a moral compass for leadership judgment, compassionate pedagogy as an expression of leadership practice, and service-oriented leadership as an institutional ethic. These dimensions are not treated as managerial prescriptions but as interpretive lenses through which leadership in Islamic educational contexts may be philosophically reimaged.

Reimagining Ontology: Maḥabbah as a Philosophical Orientation for Islamic Educational Leadership

The first sub-question explores how the Sufi concept of *maḥabbah* (divine love) might be interpreted not as an affective sentiment, but as a philosophical orientation that could inform the foundational assumptions of Islamic educational leadership, particularly in shaping how leaders understand relationality, responsibility, and moral presence within educational institutions. A hermeneutic reading of *Tanbih* and the KBC policy document reveals a thematic resonance—not an ontological unity—in how both texts conceive human existence. *Tanbih* affirms the unity of humankind through a shared Adamic origin and the divine honor bestowed upon all descendants of Adam, expressed ethically through the principle of *akur jeung batur-batur* (harmony without enmity). The KBC, meanwhile, articulates a parallel vision through the concept of *mushmat*—an inseparable unity among God, humanity, and nature-bound together by *sympatheia* (mutual love) as a cosmic mechanism.

Although emerging from distinct discursive registers—one rooted in Sufi-communal tradition, the other in bureaucratic policy—both texts position relationality as an existential foundation. This invites a rethinking of educational leadership itself—not merely as a mechanism for achieving economic productivity or policy compliance (Sosnowska, 2020; Hasmirati, 2025), but as a moral-relational vocation oriented toward cultivating ethical presence, trust, and responsibility within educational communities. This resonance also aligns in spirit with Noddings’ (2013) *ethics of care*, which frames care as an ontological stance (*being-in-relation*). However, whereas Noddings’ framework is grounded in secular humanism, the *Tanbih*-KBC articulation suggests the possibility of a spiritually grounded relationality, wherein love extends beyond the interpersonal to the ecological sphere through concepts such as *rahmah* and *sympatheia* (Kaur et al., 2023).

It is crucial to emphasize that this interpretation remains purely conceptual. There is no empirical evidence that the principle of *mushmat* is, in practice, understood or enacted by madrasah leaders and educational authorities through the lens of Sufi cosmology—such as *tajalli* or *adab*. Moreover, the KBC is a product of the modern bureaucratic state, not a grassroots Sufi movement; thus, any claim of it representing a “decolonial alternative” cannot be sustained historically. Rather than proposing an “axiomatic grammar of educational reality,” this reading offers a philosophical possibility: that divine love, as articulated both in spiritual tradition and policy discourse, may serve as a normative orientation for reimagining Islamic educational leadership in Indonesia, particularly in how leaders articulate purpose, exercise authority, and translate spiritual values into institutional

responsibility. Empirical validation of this orientation remains an important agenda for future leadership-focused case studies and action research.

Ethics of Moderation as a Leadership Framework: Harmonizing Spirituality and Citizenship in Islamic Education

The second sub-question explores how the ethical principles of *wasatīyyah* (moderation) and *tawāzūn* (balance) might inform a normative orientation for Islamic educational leadership, particularly in guiding leaders as they navigate the moral tension between spiritual fidelity and civic responsibility within plural social contexts.” A hermeneutic reading of *Tanbih* reveals a nuanced ethical stance centered on two complementary imperatives: “Do not violate the commands of Religion and State” (*Ulah aya carekeun Agama jeung Nagara*) and “Be harmonious with others, but do not mix beliefs” (*akur jeung batur-batur tapi ulah campur baur*). These injunctions do not advocate mere tolerance or passive coexistence; rather, they articulate a disciplined form of ethical comportment (*adab*) that guides educational leaders in navigating the tension between religious integrity and civic engagement, without collapsing into either isolationism or uncritical assimilation (Dani Somantri & Dahwadin, 2020; Ataman & Safitri, 2024).

The KBC policy document (Kemenag, 2025) expresses a parallel concern, reframing moderation (*tawasut*) as a corrective to social fragmentation and ethical erosion in contemporary education (Cleveland, 2022; Sin et al., 2023; Sartika et al., 2025). It proposes four paradigmatic shifts that implicitly redefine the moral horizon of educational leadership—from judgment to love, from legalism to affective relationality, from anthropocentrism to eco-theology, and from atomism to holism—as a framework for cultivating humane and tolerant character (Aslinda & Amrizon, 2025; Joseph et al., 2025; Aini et al., 2023). While these are articulated in modern policy language, they resonate thematically with *Tanbih*’s emphasis on balance, suggesting a potential philosophical alignment between Sufi ethical tradition and state-led educational reform.

Crucially, this resonance remains interpretive and conceptual. There is no evidence that KBC designers explicitly drew from *Tanbih*, nor that madrasahs currently implement moderation through this Sufi lens. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition invites a rethinking of moderation—not as a bureaucratic slogan or a performative compliance metric (Chotimah et al., 2025), but as an ongoing ethical practice that holds spiritual conviction and civic responsibility in dynamic tension. Rather than claiming to resolve long-standing discursive divides (Sahin, 2018; Albustomi, 2025), this reading proposes that *Tanbih* and the KBC, when read together, may offer complementary—though not identical—resources for reimagining what ‘moderation’ could mean for Islamic educational leadership in Indonesia, particularly as an ethical capacity exercised by leaders who must continually balance spiritual conviction with civic responsibility (Hasan et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024; Samdani et al., 2025; Zakariyah & Muttaqin, 2025). Empirical inquiry would be required to assess whether such a reading holds practical relevance in diverse institutional settings.

Pedagogy of Compassion as Leadership Practice: Enriching “Connection Before Correction” through the Ethos of *Tanbih*

The third sub-question explores how the pedagogical ethos of *Tanbih* may inform leadership judgment in interpreting—and not merely implementing—the KBC’s principle of ‘connection before correction,’ particularly in how educational leaders frame discipline, authority, and relational responsibility within institutional contexts. While the KBC adopts contemporary frameworks such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to promote relational discipline and address challenges like learning loss (Larsen et al., 2025; Udhma & Minarti, 2025; Sari, 2025), these approaches risk becoming procedural or instrumental when adopted as leadership directives devoid of deeper ethical orientation, rather than as expressions of moral authority grounded in relational responsibility (Ristiano et al., 2023; Chotimah et al., 2025). *Tanbih* offers a distinct ethical

vocabulary rooted in Sufi *adab* (ethical comportment), emphasizing relational integrity through concrete imperatives: to lead with “gentleness and full of love” (*reumas jeung giras*), to never humiliate those under one’s authority (*ulah hayang ngabina*), and to love even those who harbor ill will (*kudu asih ka jalma nu mikangewa ka maneh*). These are not behavioral techniques but expressions of a holistic spiritual worldview.

Read alongside the KBC, these Sufi injunctions may enrich the affective intent of “connection before correction” by recasting it not merely as a classroom strategy, but as a leadership ethic grounded in *rahmah* (divine mercy), shaping how authority is exercised, correction is communicated, and trust is cultivated within educational institutions. The KBC’s *Panca Cinta* (Five Loves)-spanning love for God, knowledge, the environment, humanity, and the homeland—provides a curricular structure that could, in principle, accommodate such a spiritual framing. This alignment does not imply direct influence or seamless integration, but rather suggests a potential hermeneutic bridge: the KBC’s policy language may gain deeper normative resonance when interpreted through the lens of *Tanbih*’s ethical cosmology.

However, this possibility remains interpretive. There is no evidence that current KBC training materials reference *Tanbih*, nor that teachers consciously draw on Sufi *adab* when practicing “connection before correction.” Moreover, many madrasahs—particularly those with Salafi orientations—may reject Sufi frameworks altogether. Rather than claiming “epistemic sovereignty” or “indigenization,” this reading proposes a modest philosophical proposition: that the affective goals of the KBC may find richer ethical grounding in Indonesia’s Sufi textual heritage—if educational leaders and policymakers choose to engage with it as a source of ethical orientation rather than as a doctrinal mandate (Santos, 2018; Muzakki & Sugiono, 2024). Future empirical research particularly leadership-focused case studies and institutional ethnographies—would be necessary to assess whether such an interpretive framing meaningfully informs leadership practice across diverse Islamic educational settings.

Rethinking Islamic Educational Leadership: *Rendah Babarengan* and Service-Oriented Authority

The final sub-question explores how the Sufi ethical principle of *rendah babarengan* (humility in togetherness)-as articulated in *Tanbih*-might inform a normative orientation for Islamic educational leadership, particularly in how leaders exercise authority, cultivate humility, and assume responsibility for communal well-being within educational institutions. *Tanbih* presents leadership not as hierarchical authority but as ethical comportment (*adab*), emphasizing compassion (*welas asih*) toward the vulnerable and a commitment to communal flourishing. The ideal of *Cageur Bageur*-a holistic state of physical, moral, and spiritual well-being-functions as the ultimate goal of collective life, with leadership defined by service (*khidmah*) as a mode of exercising leadership authority, rather than as mechanisms of control or managerial command. While these ideas resonate with aspects of “servant leadership,” they emerge from a distinct Sufi cosmology rooted in Sundanese Islamic tradition, not from Western management theory.

The KBC policy document expresses a parallel concern through its vision of the *Madrasah Ramah Anak* (Child-Friendly Madrasah), which prioritizes safety, non-violence, inclusion, and emotional security for all students. It also explicitly endorses *Kepemimpinan Berbasis Cinta* (Love-Based Leadership) as a guiding ethos (Adeoye et al., 2025; Bahruddin et al., 2026; Daulay et al., 2024). These policy formulations do not cite *Tanbih*, nor is there evidence they were directly inspired by Sufi texts. However, at a conceptual level, both frameworks converge on a redefinition of educational leadership authority not as command, but as responsibility; not as power over, but as care for.”: not as command, but as responsibility; not as power over, but as care for. This resonance suggests that the KBC’s leadership vision could—if interpreted through a Sufi ethical lens—find deeper grounding in Indonesia’s Islamic spiritual heritage, particularly within Sufi ethical cosmologies that have historically shaped educational leadership practices in pesantren and madrasah contexts.

Nevertheless, this alignment remains interpretive and aspirational. Many madrasahs operate under bureaucratic constraints, resource limitations, or ideological frameworks that may not embrace Sufi ethics—particularly Salafi-oriented institutions that reject *tariqa*-based teachings. Even where spiritual values like *rendah babarengan* and *Cageur Bageur* are culturally familiar, their integration into formal educational leadership is not guaranteed, especially when policy discourse adopts generic terms like “servant leadership” without rooting them in local ethical cosmologies. Rather than framing this as a “decolonial reclamation,” this reading proposes a more modest possibility: that *rendah babarengan* and *Cageur Bageur* may serve as indigenous reference points for reimagining what service-oriented Islamic educational leadership could mean in practice—its viability remaining contingent upon context, interpretive agency, and institutional will, all of which call for future leadership-focused empirical investigation.

Comparatively, the findings of this study extend—and also differentiate themselves from—recent scholarship on Islamic leadership. For instance, Hidayat (2023) identifies servant leadership within pesantren traditions as a practice grounded in service (*khidmah*) and humility, yet his analysis tends to focus on socio-relational dimensions without explicitly linking them to the spiritual ontology of divine love (*mahabbah*) or the principle of cosmic balance (*tawāzun*). This study goes beyond that approach by demonstrating that *khidmah* and *rendah babarengan* are not merely behavioral ethics but expressions of an ontological order that unifies love, balance, and institutional responsibility. On the other hand, Bandur et al. (2022) examine madrasah governance through the lens of policy and bureaucratic accountability, highlighting tensions between local autonomy and state regulation. However, they do not engage with the spiritual-ontological dimension that serves as the foundation of moral authority in many Islamic institutions (Hasanah & Husna, 2025; Salamah et al., 2025; Sarbini et al., 2025). By bridging these two scholarly currents—through philosophical hermeneutics—this research offers a framework that not only explains *how* leadership is practiced but also clarifies *why* certain values are deemed legitimate and meaningful within the epistemic context of Indonesian Islam.

The potential relevance of these findings also extends beyond madrasahs into the domain of *Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam* (PTKI)-Islamic Higher Education Institutions—even though PTKI is neither the empirical nor textual focus of this study. The mention of PTKI in the introduction is thus prospective: like madrasahs, PTKIs today face dual pressures—they are expected to meet modern standards of accreditation, research output, and managerial governance, while simultaneously being called upon to serve as strongholds of Islamic moral vision and spirituality. In this context, the *Mahabbah-Wasatiyyah Leadership* framework offers a normative language that can help PTKI leaders reflect on their authority not merely as academic managers but as guardians of ethical integrity rooted in divine love and the balance between knowledge, faith, and social responsibility. Although its implementation would require contextual adaptation, principles such as “connection before correction” or “service-oriented leadership” (*khidmah*-based leadership) could serve as an antidote to excessive bureaucratization that erodes the spiritual ethos of Islamic higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored a conceptual resonance between *Tanbih*—a Sufi ethical treatise—and Indonesia’s Love-Based Curriculum (KBC), proposing that both, in their distinct discursive forms, point toward an educational vision grounded in relationality, moderation, compassion, and service. Rather than offering a “transformative model,” this hermeneutic inquiry articulates a philosophical possibility: that spiritual traditions such as *Tanbih* may enrich the normative depth of contemporary policy frameworks like the KBC, particularly in reimagining the ethical foundations of Islamic educational leadership and institutional governance.

However, this alignment remains textual and aspirational. In real-world madrasahs—where resources are scarce, leadership cultures vary, and societal expectations often prioritize formal religious literacy over affective and relational goals—such a synthesis faces significant challenges.

Authoritarian school leadership patterns, contractual teacher insecurity, or parental resistance to “non-traditional” values such as environmental love may limit its uptake. Therefore, while this study offers a grounded philosophical orientation for rethinking Islamic educational leadership in Indonesia, its practical viability can only be assessed through future empirical research—particularly context-sensitive case studies across diverse institutional settings.

The primary contribution of this article lies in bridging a hermeneutic gap between spiritually grounded ethical traditions and state-led educational policy—not by claiming historical influence or empirical alignment, but by demonstrating how their philosophical horizons may inform one another. This contribution is conceptually synthesized in the proposed *Mahabbah–Wasatīyyah* Leadership Framework (see Figure 1), which visualizes divine love (*mahabbah*) as an ontological orientation and moderation/balance (*wasatīyyah/tamāzun*) as a normative principle shaping leadership, pedagogy, and institutional practice within Islamic education.

In this sense, the framework may be read as conceptually decolonially conscious, not as a historical counter-model to modern governance, but as a normative re-centering of Islamic educational leadership away from purely technocratic rationalities and toward ethical relationality rooted in indigenous spiritual epistemologies. Importantly, this framework is not prescriptive but propositional—its value lies in expanding the conceptual vocabulary available to educators, policymakers, and scholars concerned with leadership and governance in madrasahs, pesantrens, and broader Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

To move beyond textual possibility, this study recommends three directions for future research: (1) action research in TQN-affiliated madrasahs to explore how *Tanbih*'s ethics are already lived and enacted in leadership practice; (2) comparative case studies across diverse madrasah traditions (e.g., Salafi, modernist, traditionalist) to assess receptivity to Sufi-inflected interpretations of the KBC; and (3) policy ethnography of KBC implementation teams to investigate whether—and how—local spiritual epistemologies subtly shape leadership orientations and institutional decision-making.

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